



Town of Hopkinton

Office of Select Board

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**SELECT BOARD
PUBLIC MEETING MINUTES
Monday, November 15, 2021
Draft**

CALL TO ORDER

Chair Sabrina Dunlap called this Budget Work Session meeting of the Select Board to order at 5:31 p.m. on Monday, November 15, 2021. With the meeting being held at Town Hall, Chair Dunlap introduced the members of the Board.

Select Board

Members Present: Sabrina Dunlap, Ken Traum, Anna Wells, Jeffrey Donohoe, and Steven Whitley; David Hemenway, Chair of the Town of Webster Select Board, via Zoom, during discussion of the Transfer Station only

Staff Present: Neal Cass, Town Administrator; Cara Johnson, Administrative/Assessing Assistant; Jeff Yale, Fire Chief; and Dan Blanchette, Director of Public Works

Public Present: Bonnie Christie

ADMINISTRATIVE:

The Board reviewed documents for signature, and approved (5-0) the Consent Agenda, taking the following action on a motion made by Mr. Traum and seconded by Mr. Donohoe.

**Town of Hopkinton - Select Board
Consent Agenda
November 15, 2021**

<u>Item</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Action</u>	<u>Comment</u>
AP MANIFEST			
AP Manifest dated 11/15/2021 ch #s 67156 - 67174	11/15/2021	Approve	\$119,308.65
ELDERLY EXEMPTION			
245-032-000; 92 Pamela Lane (Sally Lester)	11/15/2021	Approve	
PROPERTY TAX ABATEMENT			
225-105-000; 14 Eagle Lane; Elderly exemption not applied (Donald Lozeau)	11/15/2021	Approve	\$1,325.00
PROPERTY BACK-TAX PAYMENT AGREEMENT			
224-017-000; Town deeded prop./paymnt. plan (Amy Bogart)	11/15/2021	Approve	
ALCOHOL PERMIT			
Contoocook Chamber of Commerce; One event only	11/15/2021	Approve	

VOTE: Dunlap, Traum, Wells, Donohoe, and Whitley voting in favor of the motion, no votes against; **MOTION PASSED 5-0.**

The Board reviewed the Public Meeting Minutes of Monday, November 8, 2021. Mr. Traum made a motion, seconded by Chair Dunlap, to approve the Public Meeting Minutes of November 8, 2021.

VOTE: Dunlap, Traum, Wells, Donohoe, and Whitley voting in favor of the motion, no votes against; **MOTION PASSED 5-0.**

Chair Dunlap proposed that a brief discussion about masks be held before the beginning of budget presentations and it was agreed this was an opportune time for the discussion. Noting that she had spoken with Mr. Cass regarding the rise in COVID-19 numbers in Hopkinton and community spread throughout Merrimack County, Chair Dunlap recommended masks be required again in Town Hall and the Slusser Center, regardless of vaccination status. The majority of the Board and Mr. Cass continued the discussion, referencing Town Hall employees and upcoming activities at the Slusser Center, and the consensus was that masks are the best means of mitigation until the number of COVID-19 cases drops. Chair Dunlap made a motion, seconded by Mr. Whitley, that masks will now be required in Town Hall and the Slusser Center.

VOTE: Dunlap, Traum, Wells, Donohoe, and Whitley voting in favor of the motion, no votes against; **MOTION PASSED 5-0.**

BUDGET PRESENTATIONS:

Chief Yale, Fire/Ambulance: Regarding preparation for the proposed budget, Chief Yale noted that he tried to keep the budget flat, and later referenced how conservative he has been with expenditures; but this year included department turnover, vacation, sick time, and maternity leave, as well as two department employees retiring within one month of each other, with leave time alone coming in at over \$30,000.00, not including any of the coverage. Focusing first on wages, training, and recruiting on the Fire side of the department, Chief Yale noted that, due to the pandemic, only vital training could be held, rather than the regular training, so there was a savings in that area. With regard to recruiting and wages, Chief Yale noted that part-time wages have not been adjusted since 2014, so a \$5,000.00 increase is being requested, with the hope of reaching a pay rate more competitive with other towns. Mr. Traum raised this topic again later in Chief Yale's presentation, and Chief Yale elaborated on the hiring and retention challenges faced by fire departments throughout the state. Even though there is a slight increase in the dispatch mutual aid proposal, Hopkinton has remained fairly steady, and Chief Yale pointed out how much work goes on behind the scenes in this area. With few budget changes to discuss in many areas, Chief Yale made a point of expressing appreciation for the Town mechanic, whose outstanding work keeps the fleet in excellent shape. With focus on keeping to this year's budget, Chief Yale noted that hose, equipment, and gear had not been purchased yet, but he hopes to make purchases before long. Mr. Traum inquired about the availability of grants for fire and rescue, and a brief discussion on this topic ensued, with Chief Yale commenting that the department hopes to receive grant money in the near future.

With regard to the Ambulance side of the department, Chief Yale noted how pleased he is with hiring some new people and that the team is coming together well. He added that training has been ongoing, and, while the availability of online courses has been a time saver, he is especially proud of the vital training the team has received at Concord Hospital. While Chief Yale reviewed the

various budget accounts, Mr. Whitley raised a question pertaining to the year-to-date expenditures on medical services, and Chief Yale pointed out that this was because payment for some services has not been made yet, and the budget for this account remains unchanged for next year. With regard to the billing service account, Mr. Traum, Chair Dunlap, and Chief Yale engaged in a brief discussion of calls vs. transports, and Mr. Traum and Chief Yale discussed the details of billing. With no further questions, Chief Yale and the Board exchanged thanks.

Dan Blanchette, Public Works Administration/Streets & Highways/Transfer

Station/Community Well/Solid Waste/Sewer/Building & Grounds: With regard to Public Works, Mr. Blanchette started with the good news that, due to a phone conversation with the uniform company, there is a 34.55% decrease in the proposed budget for employee uniforms for next year.

Transitioning to Streets and Highways, Mr. Blanchette noted the increase in proposed budgets for shimming and paving and gas, diesel, and oil, then highlighted that the 45.88% increase in the proposed budget for road salt is due to the cost of salt going from \$49.50 per ton to \$72.00 per ton. He explained that the salt is used sparingly, applied at particular times and temperatures, to maximize the efficacy, and noted that the level of service he and his team have provided over the years has garnered compliments from residents, especially in comparison to some neighboring towns. Mr. Traum raised the topics of road work and possible options for repayment, as well as contracting the work or having Mr. Blanchette and his team do the work. Mr. Blanchette handed out a document he had prepared, illustrating estimated supply costs and road lengths for a sampling of Hopkinton roads and culverts, if he and his team were to take on the work. He stressed that the figures, totaling several million dollars, did not include time/labor, equipment wear, or fuel costs. Discussion about the details ensued among Mr. Traum, Mr. Blanchette, Mr. Donohoe, Mr. Whitley, and Ms. Wells, and Ms. Wells concluded the discussion by suggesting that these topics, particularly the idea of a road bond, be revisited later.

With Chair Hemenway of the Webster Select Board now joining the meeting via Zoom, the subject turned to the Transfer Station. Mr. Blanchette introduced the first increase of the proposed budget, trash transport and disposal, followed by demolition tipping fees, which, Mr. Blanchette noted, show an increase since they have found there isn't enough to cover the number of demos they are seeing. With no questions on those increases, Mr. Traum asked Mr. Cass about the Transfer Station commercial revenue estimate for next year, and although the printed estimate is \$120,000.00, Mr. Cass indicated he believed it could be increased to \$140,000.00, since the year-to-date is actually \$140,464.00. Mr. Traum also inquired about the Webster Transfer Station reimbursement remaining at \$95,000.00, to which Mr. Cass replied that it should probably be increased to \$110,000.00. Mr. Traum asked Chair Hemenway what he knew of the status of the solar array at the transfer station and when Hopkinton would begin to see revenues from it, and Chair Hemenway responded that the solar array is still in the planning phase and his estimate, if everything goes as planned, is that some payments may begin in 2023 and normal PILOT payments should begin in 2024. Mr. Traum, Mr. Blanchette, and Chair Hemenway discussed the purchase of trailer one and two replacements, with Mr. Blanchette indicating that there is a possibility of a better deal next year, particularly if the two trailers can be purchased at the same time. Mr. Blanchette also noted that he adjusted the budget for the 10-yard packer, since the quote he received was significantly higher than someone else's previous estimate.

Turning next to Solid Waste/Community Well, Mr. Cass pointed out that it is primarily engineering fees that are paid, and then he and Mr. Traum had a brief discussion about PFAS and the possibility of federal funding.

As Sewer was the next area, there was a short discussion about Kent Barton, DPW Mechanic, not be overseeing the plant much longer, so it was suggested that Sam Currier, the Water/Sewer Superintendent, take over this responsibility. Mr. Cass noted that it would be better to explore other options, rather than assigning this to Mr. Currier. With regard to the professional services line of Sewer, Mr. Blanchette noted that there was a proposed increase, as he and Mr. Currier will be having the sewer system scoped, as this has never been done. He added that the electricity budget has a proposed increase due to the additional needs brought about by the excessive rain causing groundwater infiltration. Mr. Cass pointed out that the Sewer Department has a totally self-funding budget.

In the area of Building and Grounds, Mr. Blanchette highlighted that the only budget increase is due to the cost of boiler inspections.

Ms. Christie: In support of Mr. Blanchette and the DPW, Ms. Christie shared her enthusiasm for the outstanding work they do for Hopkinton. Everyone present echoed Ms. Christie's appreciation for Mr. Blanchette and his team, and Mr. Blanchette and the Board exchanged thanks.

Neal Cass, Revenues: Beginning with Land Use Change Tax and Timber Tax Yield Tax, Mr. Cass noted that these taxes typically land in the same place every year, so the figures look good. Regarding the PILOT (payment in lieu of taxes) program, he pointed out that he reached out to St. Methodios; they are getting everything finalized, and Mr. Cass reminded them of the deadline. Mr. Cass pointed out that the number on this line was lower because it isn't certain how things will wind up, and he expressed his conviction that revenues should be as accurate and conservative as possible, so people know what to expect. Continuing through the line items, Mr. Cass noted that Interest and Penalties on Taxes are currently at \$56,900.00, so it could go up to \$60,000.00. Other line items were in good shape, and Mr. Cass pointed out that currently, tax and DMV totals get entered monthly, but with the new software, totals will be entered daily. Mr. Whitley asked about the unusual figures in the permits and fees sections, and Mr. Cass explained this was due to the unique dog licensing situation during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and partial compensation for that in 2021. Continuing through the line items, Mr. Cass noted that Building Fees are up, and when Mr. Traum inquired about more information regarding the fees, Mr. Cass pointed out that Ms. Robertson (the Planning Director) would be providing more information on fees in the next few weeks. Mr. Traum asked if there are any updates on the Currier Road project or the sale of the Horseshoe Tavern, and Mr. Cass noted that the Currier Road team is working on finishing up the necessary research of the road and that, because it is a State road, he and Ms. Robertson had recently met with a representative of the DOT. Regarding the Horseshoe Tavern, Mr. Cass anticipates that the sale will likely close early next year. Mr. Donohoe asked about revenue from the sale of tax lien (deeded) properties and a brief discussion followed, highlighting that the plan is to have an auctioneer come, probably early next year, and this would mean there is potential for some decent revenue. Mr. Traum raised the subject of whether the Board should consider money from the American Rescue Plan, given a likely 10-20% increase in the tax rate; not that it should be utilized, but that it should be considered. He continued by reviewing the information he had shared with the Budget Committee, noting that there isn't much flexibility on the operating budget side. Chair Dunlap asked if the Town and the School District use the same health insurance company, and Mr. Cass explained that we are in the same pool, and that all options from the three municipal health

insurance providers are being explored by the School District and the Town. A brief conversation continued, and Mr. Whitley asked if there would be an opportunity during the budget presentations to talk more about the Fund Balance. Mr. Cass noted that nothing had been added to the Fund Balance section yet, so it should go up. Mr. Cass, Mr. Whitley, and Mr. Traum discussed this section, and Mr. Cass commended Hopkinton taxpayers for their timely payments, noting that we don't face some of the concerns other towns may face. It was also pointed out, in answer to a question from Mr. Traum, that Hopkinton has received about \$301,000.00 from the American Rescue Plan so far this year, and a discussion of this topic among Mr. Cass, Mr. Traum, and Mr. Whitley ensued. Chair Dunlap and Mr. Cass reviewed who will be presenting at the next meeting and some of the topics of discussion, then Chair Dunlap asked if anyone had anything else on budget topics or any other business and there was no response.

NON-PUBLIC SESSION I-RSA 91-A: 3 II (c) Reputation

Ms. Dunlap moved to go into a non-public session to discuss an issue which could affect the reputation of someone other than a Board member under the provisions of Nonpublic Session RSA 91-A: 3 II (c). Mr. Traum seconded the motion.

ROLL CALL VOTE:

Sabrina Dunlap	Yes
Ken Traum	Yes
Anna Wells	Yes
Jeffrey Donohoe	Yes
Steven Whitley	Yes

MOTION PASSED 5-0.

The Board and the Town Administrator went into nonpublic session, as recorded separately, at 7:42 p.m. The Board returned to public session at 7:55 p.m.

These minutes were not sealed.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 7:55 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Cara Johnson
Administrative/Assessing Assistant